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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0258
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000569

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SUBJECT: MORE VOTERS TO BE ABLE TO REGISTER BEFORE PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS IN MARCH 2007

Ref: Nouakchott 409

Classified by Amb. Joseph LeBaron, Reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

(C) Key Points

-- Voters who failed to register during the recent registration campaign will have another opportunity to register in January 2007, in time for the March 2007 presidential election, according to Mauritania's Independent Electoral Commission.

-- So far, nearly one million Mauritaniens have registered to vote. The government asserts that this represents 96% of all eligible voters, with fewer than 40,000 left to register.

-- However, a closer look at their figures suggests the number left to register might be closer to 150,000. And that higher number does not include the unknown number of Mauritaniens who don't have National ID cards.

-- An Electoral Commission member acknowledged that problems remain in applying for National ID cards required for voter registration (reftel).

-- All that said, the national voter list, even if incomplete at this stage, appears to be virtually fraud-free. Those names on the list are the true names of legitimate voters; a significant achievement, given Mauritania's electoral history.

-- The UN System Coordinator said that a team of UN auditors would arrive in June to assess the census process. She has told Ambassador that she expects the auditors to find that the census process meets international standards.

(C) Comments

-- It would have been even better if Mauritanian voters who missed -- or were denied -- the opportunity to register could register before the Parliamentary elections this Fall. Embassy will keep up the pressure on the government to re-open lists prior to the November municipal and Parliamentary elections.

-- Remarkably, there is no evidence that ineligible voters have been placed on the voter lists, a problem that repeatedly plagued past

elections.

-- The transition to democracy underway in Mauritania is far from perfect, but the problems of which we are aware (reftel) do not suggest to us that the international community should withdraw its support for the process.

End Key Points and Comments.

11. (C) Representatives from the Ministry of Interior, National Office of Statistics, National Independent Electoral Commission, UN Electoral Assistance team, NDI, and various international partners met May 5 to discuss the census and voter registration drive which ended April 30 after two and a half months.

Registration Figures

12. (C) The Director General of the National Office of Statistics and National Coordinator for the Census and Voter Registration Baba Ould Boumein reported that 1,013,427 Mauritians had been registered out of an estimated 1,053,424 eligible voters, declaring that the list was therefore 96 pct complete. He then said that 18,477 of those registered were found to be duplicate registrations, so the final figure would in fact be 994,950 total registered voters.

13. (C) The estimate of 1,053,424 total eligible Mauritanian voters is derived from the 1,313,424 National ID cards that have been issued since 2000 (when Mauritania began issuing their current ID cards). The National Office of Statistics then subtracted 35,000 to account for deaths (based on mortality rates rather than civil documents), 135,000 to account for those Mauritians who have left Mauritania (no

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methodology for this number was offered), and 90,000 to account for those that for various reasons do not currently have their ID cards (such as people whose cards were lost or destroyed).

14. (C) Meeting participants questioned the elimination of these 90,000 eligible voters and called for the figure to be added back into the total number of eligible voters. If these 90,000 are included, then according to Ministry of Interior figures, the census and registration drive has registered 87 pct of all eligible voters (rather than the 96 percent that Boumein had originally presented) as there are a total of 150,000 still to be registered.

Assessment of the census process

15. (C) Secretary General of the National Independent Electoral Commission Ahmed Ould Lefghih praised the government's registration efforts, adding that "these efforts should be continued to allow other registrants to be added to the voter lists in January."

16. (C) However, Electoral Commission board member Ely Ould Allaf said the Ministry of Interior's figures were problematic in that they only counted those Mauritians with ID cards, and "excluded those that had requested cards but not received them." While praising government efforts so far, he criticized the slowness of the authorities to adjudicate claims for ID cards, and the lack of responsiveness to requests for ID card application data. He hoped that the Electoral Commission would be able to report soon on the numbers of pending cases, but noted that approximately 20 percent of citizens in the eastern Tagant region did not have the required cards. He encouraged the government to continue issuing cards so more people could register in January.

17. (C) Ministry of Interior official Sidi Yeslem Ould Amar Chein said "the government has taken every effort to ensure a transparent process," adding that "what problems we have seen have come from the existing government structure and not the Census and voter registration process." He pointed out that many Mauritians, especially those who live in rural villages, have never needed ID cards, which are normally needed for salaried employment, schooling or travel.

¶18. (C) In a session among partners immediately following the meeting, all recommended to keep pressure on the government to re-open lists prior to the November municipal and legislative elections. UN Principal Technical Advisor Mathieu Bile Bouah believed that if the government re-opened census offices for just two weeks, it would allow enough time for the rest of the eligible voters who obtain ID cards in the coming months to register.

¶19. (C) Bouah said the UN was still waiting for the government to provide a public financing scheme for political parties, the determination of a voting method (proportional representation v. winner-take-all), and the system for ensuring 20 percent female participation in the coming parliament. Lefghih joined Bouah in stressing the need for the government to begin its education outreach to voters for the November Constitutional Referendum.
LeBaron